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C O N F I D E N T I A L FRANKFURT 001588

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/AGS

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Germany Says, Well, Hello Dalai: Spiritual Leader's Visit
Stirs Debate and Party Dissension

Ref: May 19 Berlin Emboff Lee-EAP/CM Norris email exchange; May 13
China Emboffs Moeling/Kritenbrink-Berlin Emboff Bernstein email
exchanges

Classified by: CG Jo Ellen Powell for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary. The Dalai Lama's visit to Germany sparked political controversy over who would meet with him and highlighted intra-coalition and, in the case of the SPD, intra-party disagreement (see septel from Berlin). The Dalai Lama himself remained above the fray, sticking to a message of cultural autonomy for Tibet and emphasizing the importance of dialogue with the Chinese government. In the end, the Dalai Lama's schedule during his five-day stay in Germany was relatively full, as he met with Development Minister Wieczorek-Zeul (SPD), CDU Ministers-President Koch and Ruettggers, Bundestag President Lammert, several senior Bundestag parliamentarians, and Ambassador Timken. The Dalai Lama also attracted some 25,000 people to a public rally at the Brandenburg Gate, where he spoke. End Summary.

TO MEET OR NOT TO MEET

12. (SBU) Already months before his arrival in Germany, the Dalai Lama's visit here stirred up political debate over whether to meet with the Tibetan spiritual leader or not. As CDU politicians lined up meetings with him, the Social Democrats' (SPD) interest was conspicuously absent, with Foreign Minister Steinmeier himself announcing that he would not meet with the Dalai Lama. According to press reports, Steinmeier justified his refusal to meet the Dalai Lama in the context of his efforts to repair Sino-German relations, which were upset last year when Chancellor Angela Merkel received the Dalai Lama in a "private" meeting at the Chancellery.

13. (U) The surprise announcement by SPD Development Minister Heide-Marie Wieczorek-Zeul to meet with the Dalai Lama, therefore, drew strong criticism from within her own party. Over the weekend SPD party chairman Kurt Beck was overheard by journalists criticizing her decision in blunt (some would say vulgar) language, and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier was also publicly critical of her decision. Beck later explained his comments, noting he was not critical of the fact that Wieczorek-Zeul met with the Dalai Lama, but rather that he had not been informed about it. According to Beck, the Dalai Lama had also asked for a meeting with him but withdrew the request because his home state of Rheinland-Pfalz was not part of the visit.

DALAI LAMA STRESSES CULTURAL AUTONOMY

14. (SBU) Contacts in Wieczorek-Zeul's ministry told us that the May 19 meeting between Wieczorek-Zeul and the Dalai Lama only briefly touched on the issue of Tibet and focused instead on the effects of globalization, ways to combat poverty, and last week's earthquake in

China. Our contacts stressed the Minister's public comments that the dialogue with religious leaders was an important element of the Ministry's development work.

¶5. (C) The Dalai Lama also had a series of meetings with Bundestag officials, including appointments with Bundestag President Norbert Lammert (CDU), who gave a strongly supportive speech introducing the Dalai Lama in Bochum, CDU/CSU caucus leader Volker Kauder, Greens co-party chair Claudia Roth, and members of the Human Rights and Foreign Affairs committees. The Dalai Lama's common themes throughout the meetings were an emphasis on cultural autonomy for Tibet as well as for other ethnic groups and the importance of using global attention on the issue and the upcoming Olympic Games to maintain pressure on China to continue serious dialogue. He also expressed his concerns that both public attention and China's willingness to talk would diminish once the Olympics ended. He stressed the importance of concrete progress over the next few months that the Chinese cannot ignore after the Games are over.

¶6. (C) The Dalai Lama also received Ambassador and Mrs. Timken at the Dalai Lama's hotel suite in Berlin on May 19. During this short courtesy call at the Ambassador's request (see ref EAP email), the Ambassador and the Dalai Lama discussed the United States' relationship with Germany, the important role of religious leaders in countering extremism, and shared concerns about the recent earthquake in China. The Dalai Lama inquired briefly on Germany's relationship with Russia, which the Ambassador characterized as a sensitive issue that is somewhat divided along German political party lines. The Ambassador highlighted the role that the Embassy has played in Germany on Muslim outreach and ethnic integration, and stressed USG support for the Dalai Lama's efforts to promote peaceful dialogue.

¶7. (C) Before arriving in Berlin, the Dalai Lama appeared at two large public events in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and two in Bavaria, and met with two CDU Ministers-President: Juergen Ruettggers of NRW and Roland Koch of Hesse. His meeting with Koch at the Frankfurt airport shortly after his arrival in Germany on May 15 was particularly cordial, as the ties between the two men go back more than a decade to Koch's days as a state parliamentarian. According to a private read-out from a senior advisor to Koch, the Dalai Lama reported that the Chinese had agreed to further talks in June with his representatives, although neither the logistical details nor the agenda had been arranged. The Tibetans were pleasantly surprised by China's "open and benevolent offer," but the Dalai Lama stressed that these talks must address at least some of the more difficult issues and can not be, for example, merely talks about arranging more talks. The Dalai Lama also asked for Koch's advice on how to handle the political debate in Germany surrounding his visit. Koch counseled him not to become personally involved and to stay neutral, advice that the Dalai Lama appears to have followed throughout his trip. Koch also traveled to Bochum and spent at least four hours with the Dalai Lama's program there.

¶8. (SBU) According to a participant in the 45-minute meeting with Minister-President Ruettggers, the Dalai Lama made many of the same points on autonomy and the talks with the Chinese that he later made in Berlin, and took a decidedly apolitical tone, with little criticism of the Chinese government and much praise for its handling of the earthquake. Ruettggers offered a spirited defense of his decision to meet with the Dalai Lama, while avoiding direct criticism of Steinmeier.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: The bickering over who would agree to meet with the Dalai Lama was more about political jockeying and differing diplomatic styles than policy differences, since none of the major players disagree on Germany's "One China" policy or on support for greater human rights in China. While the Tibet issue will undoubtedly subside somewhat now that the Dalai Lama's visit is over and attention is focused positive coverage of China's earthquake response, it will not go away, given this summer's Olympic Games. In addition, any further unrest in Tibet could increase the political stakes, especially for the SPD, as Beck and Steinmeier appear to be on the wrong side of public opinion on the issue. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Berlin and Congen Duesseldorf.
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